



GRACE CHURCH, MT. AIRY.

History of Twenty-Five Years

IN

GRACE CHURCH MT. AIRY

June 1875—June 1900

PSALMS 16:6—"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea
I have a goodly heritage."

ZACHARIAH 4:6—"Not by might, nor by power, but by My
spirit saith the Lord of Hosts."

TWENTY-FIVE years ago to-day I preached my first sermon as Rector of Grace Church, Mt. Airy. Coming from that beautiful city by the sea, Newport, R. I., from a church as large or larger than this, with a congregation larger than greets us from Sunday to Sunday, to the small but picturesque church on Mt. Airy Avenue, needing repairs within and without, its main Sunday School meeting in the church, its Infant School in the basement, presented a strong contrast to what had been left behind; but the warmth of the greeting in the little basement room, bedecked with flowers, helped to cover many deficiencies and make the Rector believe that he had many co-workers who would unite cordially with him in building up the parish and gathering some of those who had strayed into another fold. The following gentlemen composed the Vestry, and united in the call and welcome of the Rector: Judge Stroud, Franklin B. Gowen, C. M. Bayard, C. H. Miller, Daniel Holmes, E. V. Lansdale, A. G. La Rue, J. Henry Dunn and Dr. Shellenberger. Messrs. Charles Spencer, Charles LeBoutillier and Joseph W. Lewis were not present, really being members of Christ Church, Germantown, and returning to their own church that year. Many of these have entered into the paradise of God.

Messrs. Dunn, Miller, Bayard and Lansdale are the only ones left of the original twelve. The second funeral which I attended, viz: on July 2, 1875, was that of Judge Stroud the Rector's Warden, eminent at the bar and in the Church, a Vestryman and prominent in the work of Grace Church. There had been some little trouble at Christ Church, Germantown,

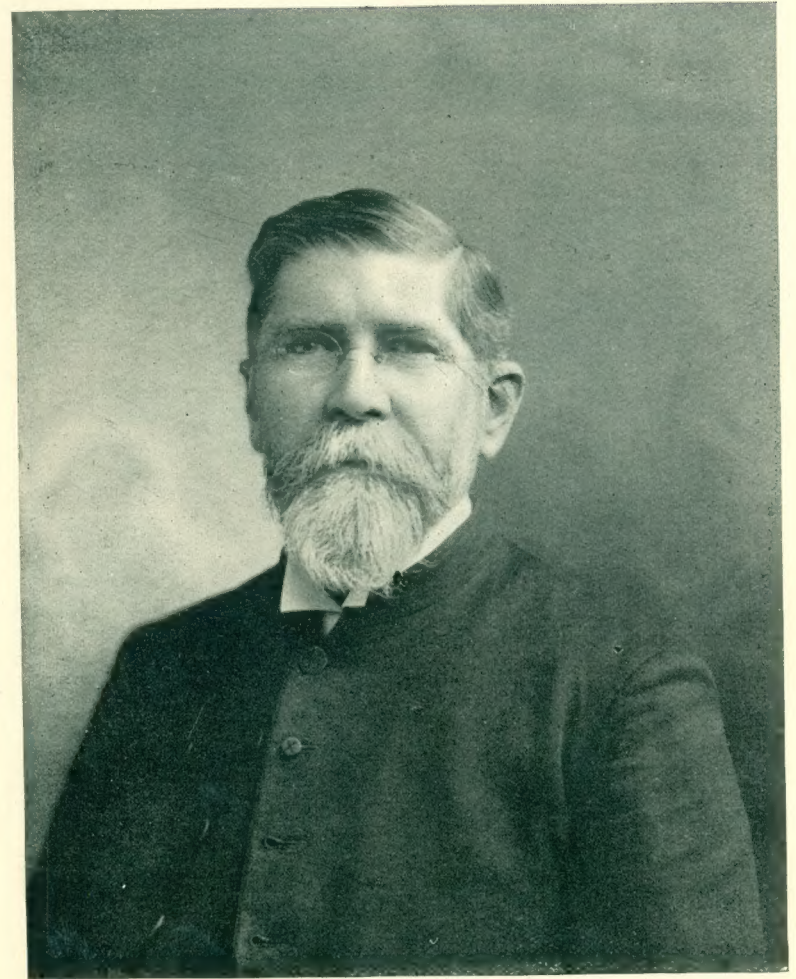
and quite a number had taken pews in Grace Church, and given it a temporary strength, so that in May, 1874, the receipts amounted to \$3,609.79, but even then the Rector, Rev. G. A. Redles, reported only 75 communicants. During 1875 (Feb. 8th) he resigned, and entered the Reformed Episcopal Church, taking with him some of the godly women and earnest workers, especially Miss Rebecca Stroud, whose life was devoted to the work of the Master. Therefore, while the new Rector found a perfectly united church, he found the church in the lowest condition in which it had been for years. "But the people had a mind to work," and they gave themselves heartily in the Church and Sunday School. Steps were very soon taken to build a Rectory on the lot adjoining the church. This was done during that church year, and in March it was finished and occupied. The receipts for that first year, May, 1875, to May, 1876, were \$9,100.72. The ground rent of the new lot was merged into the mortgage, which amounted to \$4,000, and that amount remained until the property was sold. Mt. Airy had been for a long time a quiet, rural suburb of Philadelphia. Rarely was there a new house built. Large portions of land in the William Schaeffer and James Gowen estates had practically prevented any enlargement until, under the provisions of the will of James Gowen, the executors of the estate took steps toward opening that large tract of land.

Gowen Avenue was a narrow but beautiful country lane through farm land. All of Gowen Avenue, Roumfort Avenue, Boyer Street, a large part of Mt. Airy Avenue, all of Durham, and that portion of Mt. Pleasant Avenue from the Main Street down, as well as a large part of East Mt. Pleasant and all of Bryan Street were built up. In fact, this whole section has

been revolutionized since your Rector came. The saddest of all is the change by removal and death. The congregation of to-day, with few exceptions, is a stranger to the conditions of twenty-five years ago.

The slow but steady growth in the old church on Mt. Airy Avenue, was an evidence of appreciation of the spiritual privileges of the Church. At one time it looked as if we would be compelled to build a new church before the increased numbers called for it. It was after Christmas, January 18, 1882, and the sexton had lighted one or two burners, just before the pressure was turned on in the city. He went down stairs to attend to some work when suddenly he heard the cry of fire from the one occupant of the church. In five minutes the interior of the church was filled with flame and smoke. The gas had set fire to the Christmas decorations, and spread rapidly through the whole church. An attempt by the sexton and Rector to take out some of the chancel furniture was stopped by the intense heat and smoke. The doors were closed to see if the smoke would check it long enough for the firemen to arrive. That saved the church building, but it was so damaged that the interior had to be largely renewed. If it had burned to the ground the church would have been rebuilt on the same lot, probably near the front. Then there would not have been the removal to this location. The membership continued to increase, and it soon became evident that there must be a new church. The subject was discussed in the Vestry and among the people. There were two lots offered to the Vestry; one by Mrs. Bostwick, on the Main Street, below Sedgwick, and next to the Memorial Free Library. This generous offer the Vestry felt compelled to decline because they felt that it would not do to go below Mt.

Airy Avenue. Mrs. James E. Gowen also offered a lot on the corner of Gowen Avenue and Main Street. The Vestry then issued a statement to the pew holders, stating the offer, and also that if the majority agreed to accept the proposition, then it was "proposed to build a new church on this ground as soon as may be, and afterwards to take down the present structure, using the materials, if possible, in the erection of a parish building, the present lot to be sold to defray a part of the expense of building the new church." This was ratified by a large majority, and the lot was accepted by a formal vote of the Vestry. At this juncture Mr. Franklin B. Gowen, one of the executors of his father's estate, came forward with a new proposition, which was to give the church two lots on Gowen Avenue and Ardleigh Street, 200 by 230 feet, also guaranteeing quite a sum of money in cash from himself and other members of the family. I must say frankly that my heart was set on the lot at the corner of Gowen and Germantown Avenues, and for a location for work, a centre convenient for the people, I believe still that it was an ideal location. But for beauty of situation, for quietness from Sunday travel and noise of trolleys, this is the ideal spot, and it is also probable, that for the future, when Stenton Avenue becomes not only a noble thoroughfare, but beautified with homes, that then the wisdom of Mr. Gowen will be more than justified. When the proposition to build was considered it took four forms. To build on the old location; to remove to the Main Street below Sedgwick; to build on the corner of Gowen Avenue and Main Street; or the present spot where we now are. A committee was appointed and reported: "The Vestry having decided not to go below Mt. Airy Avenue, left three propositions. Mrs. Bostwick and Mrs.



REV. SIMEON C. HILL.
RECTOR.

Breese offered \$8,000 if the church was built on the old location, hallowed by many memories; \$10,000 in addition had been subscribed, making \$18,000. The second, corner of Gowen Avenue and Germantown Avenue, carried with it a cash subscription of \$14,220, but there was a fatal limitation of allowing only the church to be built on the lot, the rectory and parish house to be built elsewhere. The third proposition was this present position, with a cash guarantee of \$20,230, the only limitation being that the tower of the church be placed on the north side." Even then Mr. Gowen appeared to have in mind the architecture of the church he desired. This last proposition was unanimously adopted. It is not often a church has such an embarrassment of riches. A plan prepared by the architect, Mr. Charles M. Burns, Jr., was, after modification, adopted. The building committee was as follows: Messrs. E. V. Lansdale, Chairman; C. M. Bayard, C. C. Turnbull, C. H. Miller, F. I. Gowen and C. C. Binney. In the minute book of the Vestry is this note by the Secretary: "June 13, 1888, at 1 P. M., the Rev. S. C. Hill offered a prayer on the lot corner of Gowen Avenue and Ardleigh Street, and Mr. Charles H. Miller, of Gowen Avenue, dug the first spadeful of earth from the foundation of the new Grace Church; the Rev. S. C. Hill the second, and the following persons were present and each dug a spadeful of earth: Miss Rachael Miller, Miss Elizabeth Miller and Mrs. Hartman." The corner stone was laid September 18, 1888, Bishop O. W. Whitaker making the address, and the following clergy taking part in the service: Rev. Dr. Atkins, R. A. Edwards, J. B. Falker, D. D., Rev. James Lamb and Rev. J. L. Miller. The old church property was sold for \$14,000. The new church having been finished, and the money to pay all

indebtedness having been provided, steps were taken for the consecration. The Bishop appointed Wednesday, the 13th of November, 1889, at 11 A. M. The Bishop of the Diocese was the Consecrator, and the sermon was preached by Rt. Rev. Dr. Whitehead, Bishop of Pittsburg, a classmate of the Rector. About sixty of the clergy were present, notwithstanding the terrible storm. They were kindly entertained by Mr. F. B. Gowen at noon. I must now retrace my steps a little way to speak of a new element which, as an organization, assisted the Vestry in the work of finishing the church. The Women's Guild was organized February 12, 1888, and immediately took a large interest in the work of building the new church. This Guild purchased the cushions for the church; furnished the chancel, even to the Bishop's chair, rail and choir stalls, the lectern and pulpit; furnished the Vestry room and their own Guild room, and a few years afterward built the addition to the parish house. They also assisted in the finishing of the rectory by paying for mantels, fireplaces, tile, gas fixtures, etc. To show what help the women of a parish can be, not only to the building and furnishing the church, but for all kinds of missionary work, the following statement of amount of money raised and expended by them is the very best evidence. From February 12, 1888, to June 1, 1900, they have raised \$13,902.89. While the larger part of this has been paid out for the church in furnishing, and in an addition to the parish house, and for the reduction of the mortgage, yet the mission work of the church has not been forgotten. The Rector has never made an appeal to them in vain. The last great effort which they have made to reduce the mortgage of \$7,000, has been a great success, even though it has not been completed. They began this in November,



CHARLES M. BAYARD.
ACCOUNTING WARDEN.

1897; they have raised \$5,732.67; they need \$1,267.33 —\$250 has been promised as the last payment, leaving \$1,017.33 actual amount, which they hope to raise in 1900.

There had fallen upon the church a great disaster in the death of Franklin B. Gowen, Esq., in the city of Washington, December 17, 1889. For over fourteen years Rector's Warden, a constant attendant and regular communicant of the church, taking the deepest interest in the welfare of everything that pertained to the temporal and spiritual development of the parish, in all things showing himself a friend and counselor of the Rector, his loss was felt to be irreparable. I quote a portion of the minute adopted by the Vestry: "Mr. Gowen manifested not only the brilliant mental endowments, unshaken steadfastness of purpose and dauntless courage which have won him a wide and lasting reputation among men, but also those higher and rarer qualities which mark the sincere Christian. Ruling his life consistently by the principles of right and truth, he was enabled by God's blessing to present an example of Christian integrity, pure and *untarnished in the sight of all men.*"

The need of a rectory was felt by all to be a pressing necessity. At a meeting of the Vestry, May 3, 1890, Mr. Francis I. Gowen stated that he was authorized to inform the Vestry that Mrs. Franklin B. Gowen desired to erect a parish building, and that Mrs. James E. Gowen desired to present a lot southwest of the church property, to be sold or mortgaged, and the proceeds to be applied to the building of a rectory." Thus it came to pass that through the liberal generosity of these two women the present plan of the church, rectory and parish house was completed. As one looks

at it to-day with its beautiful surroundings, and with such hearty good will toward the Rector of the congregation, he can readily say, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, yea I have a goodly heritage."

There has been struggle, toil and sacrifice, but the result is worth it all. This was a small community; it is not a large community now. There are not, and never were, any rich people in the church—as we speak of wealth to-day, yet in the twenty-five years that I have been with you there has been given in round numbers through the Accounting Warden \$170,000 for all purposes. This does not include the amount spent for the parish house, as those funds did not pass through the Accounting Warden's hands. If we call that \$12,000 it would make \$182,000 given by this parish. And this does not include the beautiful stained glass windows, memorials of the sainted dead, nor those other gifts and memorials, such as the beautiful font at the entrance of the church, the prayer desks and hymn board, the altar hangings and linens, the Dossels, the book rest and service book, the cross and vases, the plates for the offertory, the solid silver communion service and alms basin, also the two lots on which the church now stands, value \$10,000. These many gifts, more than one would suppose, so quietly and continuously have they been given, would bring the sum total up to \$200,000, which has come from this people in twenty-five years. I think we can all apply the second text which I have selected for this morning, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit saith the Lord." This work surely is of God. It has been blessed by Him. The 303 baptisms, 277 confirmed, 64 married and the 233 buried, and the visits numbering about 12,000, and a communicant list of 255 show a little of the work, and something of the progress. Whatever has been

helpful to any man or woman, in sermons or visits, belongs to God; whatever you have done for the Master has been of love, in slight return for His great mercies to you and yours. It remains to call your attention to the Sunday School, which has been under the present superintendent, Charles M. Bayard, for the whole twenty-five years. When your Rector came, it was the only Sunday School, except the Methodist, in the neighborhood. Children of all denominations came, as many do now. Other schools have sprung up and, of course, taken their own children. Still, we have held our own. Often lacking teachers, those we had were good, and as a rule held their children. We have in the school: officers and teachers in main school, 15; scholars, 107; infant school, officers and teachers, 4; scholars, 68; total, 194. Their offerings for this year were \$205.63. All this means work, and a work that will tell in the coming years, for God and man. It tells of a persistent faith, holding through Summer and Winter, through discouragements as well as encouragements. The final good no man can measure; God alone knows that. Whatever of good has come to teacher and children, has come through the Spirit of God, to whom we give all glory and honor. And now brethren beloved, with whom I have worked most imperfectly these short twenty-five years; whose children I have baptized, and presented for confirmation; whose beloved I have followed with you to the last earthly resting place; to you I give most sincere thanks for cordial support in the work of the church, for your charity in my imperfections, for your often too high regard, and especially for your love and esteem. May God's spirit guide us through the coming years, help us to work together efficiently and lovingly, and may He crown the work at last with His own, "Well done, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord".